



# University of Lancashire

## Evaluation of the Lancashire Women Reducing Recalls project

by

Rebecca Fish and Jayn Pearson

University of Lancashire

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**Criminal Justice  
Partnership**



# Contents

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|                                                                     |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Executive Summary</b> .....                                      | 3  |
| <b>Introduction and Background to the Project</b> .....             | 4  |
| <b>Evaluation</b> .....                                             | 10 |
| Analysis of Data provided by Lancashire Women.....                  | 10 |
| Figure 1: Geographical areas .....                                  | 11 |
| Table 1: Offence type.....                                          | 11 |
| Table 2: number of recalls of women on project.....                 | 12 |
| Table 3: presenting needs reported by the women .....               | 12 |
| Figure 2: accommodation outcomes (DTR = Duty to Refer) .....        | 13 |
| Immediate feedback from women on the project .....                  | 13 |
| Service User responses regarding barriers to resettlement .....     | 14 |
| <b>Interview and Survey Findings</b> .....                          | 16 |
| Figure 3: Hierarchy of themes arising from the interviews .....     | 16 |
| 1. Understanding of the Project’s aims and activities.....          | 17 |
| 2. IMPACT: Bridging the Gap Between Custody and Community .....     | 17 |
| 3. IMPACT: Building Self-Worth and Independence .....               | 18 |
| 4. IMPACT: Consistency and Relationship-Building.....               | 18 |
| 5. IMPACT: Communication and Joined-Up Working .....                | 19 |
| 6. Enduring Barriers – Experienced by Women and Practitioners ..... | 19 |
| Lack of appropriate housing and support.....                        | 19 |
| Loneliness and Isolation.....                                       | 21 |
| ‘Piccadilly’ effect .....                                           | 21 |
| Lack of Time .....                                                  | 22 |
| Disruption and Instability.....                                     | 22 |
| Systemic Strain.....                                                | 22 |
| Trauma, Risk and Relapse .....                                      | 23 |
| Summary: Observed Benefits for Women.....                           | 23 |
| Summary: Benefits for Staff and Working Practices.....              | 24 |
| Summary: Recommendations for Policy.....                            | 24 |
| Summary: Recommendations for the Reducing Recalls Project.....      | 26 |
| <b>Ongoing Implementation of Recommendations</b> .....              | 27 |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....                                             | 28 |
| <b>References</b> .....                                             | 28 |

## Executive Summary

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**Background:** Prison recall has become an increasingly significant feature of the UK criminal justice system, with recalls increasing by 130% between 2021/22 and 2025/26 and the annual cost of imprisonment following recall estimated at almost £750 million (Nacro, 2026). Many recalls do not involve a new offence but breaches of licence conditions, such as failure to reside or keep in touch. These may reflect structural difficulties including homelessness, poverty, substance use and limited access to support, rather than increased risk of reoffending (ibid). This is particularly significant for women, who often experience intersecting disadvantage, including poverty, domestic and sexual violence, trauma, mental ill-health and substance use. Only 17% of women's recalls in the year to September 2024 involved a further charge (Prison Reform Trust, 2025).

The Lancashire Women Reducing Recalls Project provides intensive, gender-responsive support to women returning to custody on two or more occasions. Based at HMP Styal, a dedicated Recalls Officer works across custody and community to identify reasons for recall, coordinate services and improve continuity of support. This evaluation used interviews with women, staff and stakeholders, an online practitioner survey and anonymised project data to examine the project's impact and identify how relational, needs-led approaches could reduce persistent recall.

**Findings:** Women emphasised the importance of practical, consistent and trauma-informed support. Accommodation, access to services and practical assistance on release, including transport, phones, food and toiletries, were particularly valued. Having a familiar worker from custody into the community provided continuity and trust, with women describing feeling calmer, more supported and more motivated to remain in the community. In some cases, this contributed to immediate positive outcomes, including attending probation appointments and securing accommodation.

Women also described significant barriers following release. These included unsuitable accommodation, substance use, mental health difficulties, geographical displacement and difficulties accessing services. Apparent 'non-engagement' was often linked to systemic barriers, including difficulties attending appointments, housing instability, problems with electronic tags, poor communication and release before adequate support was in place. Some women reported deliberately returning to custody because they felt unable to cope in the community or believed they would receive better support in prison.

Staff and stakeholder accounts reinforced the importance of the immediate post-release period and the project's role as a bridge between custody and community. However, wider structural barriers remained, particularly shortages of suitable accommodation, limited adult social care and substance-use provision, isolation and short recall timeframes.

Overall, the findings suggest that persistent recall cannot be addressed through compliance-focused approaches alone. Effective prevention requires sustained, trusted relationships alongside practical and structural support, particularly in housing, health and social care, substance-use treatment, meaningful activity and community connection.

# Introduction and Background to the Project

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The recall of individuals to prison following release on licence has become a significant feature of contemporary criminal justice in the UK, costing almost £750 million a year in imprisonment only (Nacro, 2026). This is particularly significant given the substantial recent growth in the use of recall. The number of people recalled to custody increased by 130% between 2021/22 and 2025/26, having remained broadly stable between 2016/17 and 2020/21 (Nacro, 2026). In the first three months of 2026, there were more recalls than releases for the first time, highlighting the extent to which recall is contributing to pressure on an already overcrowded prison system (Nacro, 2026). Some of the largest increases in recall relate to conditions which are closely connected to the circumstances in which people are expected to resettlement. Recalls citing 'failure to reside' increased by 155%, from 5,600 in 2016/17 to 12,450 in 2025/26. In practice, failure to reside may reflect homelessness or insecure accommodation rather than deliberate non-compliance. People supported by Nacro have described leaving specified accommodation because it was unsafe, for example where other residents were violent or using drugs, only to be recalled for doing so. Similarly, recalls for 'failure to keep in touch' have more than doubled since 2016/17, increasing from 7,664 to 19,751. These patterns suggest that recall can operate as a response to the consequences of inadequate housing, instability and limited support, rather than simply as a response to increased risk of reoffending.

Women comprise around 4% of the prison population in England and Wales but experience uniquely complex pathways into, through, and out of the criminal justice system (Prison Reform Trust, 2025), having been disproportionately affected by recall practices over previous decades (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Williams & Earle, 2022). Women in custody are consistently more likely than men to have experienced poverty, domestic and sexual violence, mental ill-health, self-harm, and substance use (Ministry of Justice, 2025; Player, 2014; Women in Prison, 2025). These factors often persist post-release, shaping women's capacity to meet the conditions of probation. Research has highlighted that a growing proportion of women are returned to prison not for new offences but for breaching licence conditions, often linked to non-compliance (Minson, 2024). This includes missing appointments, being in inappropriate accommodation, or relapsing into substance use, factors related to structural disadvantage and inequalities (Annison et al., 2015). In the year to September 2024 there were 2,603 recalls of women to custody, of which only 17% involved women facing further charge. Women serving a sentence of less than 12 months accounted for 61% of recalls (Prison Reform Trust, 2025: 2). The recall rate for women is higher than for men, with one recall for every four women under post-release supervision in the first three months of 2026, compared to one recall for every five men, with recalled women experiencing higher risk of poor resettlement outcomes (Nacro, 2026).

Much literature critiques current and changing policy in terms of recalls, as 78.5% of recalls are not associated with further charges (Nacro, 2026). Many suggest that the current system is too focused on risk management, with this being 'at the expense of desistance focused practice which emphasises building strengths and demonstrating a belief in people's ability to change' (Ali et al., 2025:9). In 2025, Martin Jones, Chief Inspector of Probation, said prisoners are being sent back to jail due to increasing caseloads rather than about public protection, because it's the 'easiest thing to do'. He argued that the

government needs to take steps to reduce recalls to avoid overcrowded prisons (Malone & Dunford, 2025).

Most of the research exploring reasons behind prison recalls relates to men, such as the recent Switchback report (2025), and Fitzalan Howard's (2019) study. Both of these sources demonstrate the damaging nature of recalls, how they are considered to be counter-rehabilitative and the fact that they are not considered to be used as a last resort by their respondents. Recommendations include harnessing positive and continuing relationships, improve communication and taking a localised and person-centred, needs-led approach to rehabilitation that centres on relational practice (O'Meara et al., 2021). A view echoed by HM Inspectorate of Probation ([Relational practice – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)).

A key body of work focuses on risk discourse in probation, and how this underpins high recall rates. In the UK context, Phillips (2017) critique the rise of 'risk-led' recall decisions and argue for a more relational, needs-led model of supervision, this is echoed in the Switchback report (2025). Several scholars frame recall as an extension of carceral control into community settings. Women's lives, often marked by instability, become subject to stringent expectations, and minor breaches are treated as risks requiring containment through reincarceration. Hannah-Moffat (2016) introduces the concept of 'gendered risk', suggesting that women's behaviour is perceived through lenses shaped by managerialism-type risk discourses. This results in heightened surveillance and recall for women whose vulnerabilities are framed as individual risk factors - factors such as mental illness, housing instability, or associations with men are perceived as dangerous.

The Corston Report (2007) was a landmark policy document, calling for a radical shift towards gender-specific criminal justice responses. Yet academic literature suggests limited systemic change. The introduction of the Women Justice Board in 2025 does give some cause or optimism with their goal of reducing the number of women in prison and addressing the distinct needs of women in the criminal justice system. However, probation licence conditions are claimed to be generic and inflexible, often incompatible with women's social realities (e.g., needing to avoid certain areas due to past trauma or lack of secure housing) (see Khan, 2023).

Carlton and Segrave (2016), writing in an Australian context but with strong relevance to the UK, characterise parole and recall systems as reflecting contradictions between punishment and rehabilitation. They argue that women are required to demonstrate compliance with prescriptive conditions while managing trauma and deprivation with little structural support, producing conditions ripe for recall.

Further, the short-term nature of recalls faced criticism. The Howard League's analysis of Women's Centres (2016:4) comments:

Nothing positive can be achieved in 14 days in prison; those recalled simply go through the induction process again and spend the vast majority of time locked in their cells. Any progress that had been made with women's centres in terms of housing, child care or employment or training is lost and the processes need to be started again. The inquiry heard that this merry-go-round of imprisonment was having a negative impact on the women's children, often disrupting where they were living, their schooling and creating distress.

These concerns are particularly timely given the substantial changes to sentencing, release and recall taking place during the lifespan of this project. From April 2026 (although outside of this evaluation period), the recall framework changed so that the majority of recalls are now for a fixed period of 56 days, replacing shorter fixed-term recalls alongside changes to the arrangements for standard determinate sentence recalls. In 2025, around two thirds of recalls were fixed at either 14 or 28 days, meaning that the move towards predominantly 56-day recalls represents a significant change in the experience of being recalled. The Ministry of Justice has argued that the additional time in custody will allow probation staff to implement risk management plans and establish appropriate licence conditions, with the intention of reducing the risk of further recall (ref?). However, this change also makes it particularly important to understand what happens during recall and whether longer periods in custody produce better resettlement outcomes for women.

The shift from 14- and 28-day recalls to predominantly 56-day recalls makes these earlier concerns particularly relevant rather than resolving them. While a longer period in custody may provide greater opportunity for risk management and resettlement planning, it also has the potential to further disrupt accommodation, relationships, employment, caring responsibilities and community-based support. For women whose recall is linked to housing instability, difficulties maintaining contact or other forms of social disadvantage, a longer period in custody may therefore compound rather than resolve the conditions associated with recall.

Against this background, there is a need for research that moves beyond asking whether women comply with licence conditions to examine the conditions under which compliance is expected, the support available to women following release, and the processes through which recall decisions are made. In particular, there remains limited research exploring women's own experiences of short-term recall and the extent to which recall supports or undermines resettlement. This evaluation addresses this gap by examining women's experiences of recall, the circumstances that preceded it, its impact on relationships and resettlement, and the support available before, during and after recall alongside the impact it has had on staff working with the criminal justice system.

## Recent developments

Some recent developments in interventions and grey literature around recalls are:

- In 2023, the Howard League produced 'Know your rights: An animation on licence and recall'. This is a video animation to support people in prison to know their rights when it comes to recall. They note that recall is one of the common issues raised on their legal advice line (see also Ragonese et al., 2023).
- In April 2024, a blog by *Revolving Doors* called 'Recalls in crisis: What needs to change?' highlights the rise in the rate of recall and the way that recall is contributing to a revolving door problem in prison. It also points out the importance of the relationship between probation officers and people on licence, and calls for a comprehensive re-evaluation of the approach to recalls, that focuses on long-term solutions over short-term fixes.

- The 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (Prison Reform Trust, 2025) highlights the rising rate of recall. They describe the dramatic rise in the rate of prison recall as threatening to undermine emergency overcrowding measures.
- *Catch 22's 'Fixing Fixed Term Recall'* (2025) sets out the particular issues caused by fixed term recalls, highlighting issues in the communication of licence conditions and the lack of alternatives to recall. It concludes with calls for more alternatives to recall, and better continuity of rehabilitation.
- In January 2025, a coalition of charities collectively wrote an open letter in support of Gaie Delap, a woman who was recalled because the probation service could not find a tag small enough to fit her. This case was used to spotlight wider failings in the recall system.
- Late 2025 and early 2026 saw policy reviews such as The Centre for Justice Innovation's recommendations for problem solving courts for women, The Sentencing Act changes, and the update of the Ministry of Justice's guidance on 'Recall, review and re-release of recalled prisoners'. Further, a number of papers outlining concerns about prison recalls were published, making recommendations for change, including The Women's Justice Board's 'Recommendations for Reducing Women's Imprisonment', and the Prison Reform Trust's 'Resetting the Approach to Women's Imprisonment'.

## What does the literature tell us about women's experiences?

Lived experience reports of women who have been recalled to prison show that many women were not recalled for a new offence, but because barriers exacerbated by the original prison stay made it difficult to comply with licence conditions (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2022; Pemberton et al., 2019). Women report being released without proper housing, mental health support, or financial stability. When they fail to meet strict conditions like attending multiple appointments, abstaining from drugs/alcohol, or maintaining curfews, they may be recalled (Williams & Earle, 2022).

Many women speak about being released to homelessness, sofa surfing, or unsafe environments, including returning to abusers. These conditions increase the risk of being recalled. Insecure housing is one of the most common reasons for non-compliance (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2022). Further, a significant number of women who are recalled have existing mental health diagnoses and trauma histories. Further, licence conditions are often standardised rather than individualised, ignoring the specific needs and circumstances of women. Women report that they are set up to fail (Carlton & Segrave, 2016). This demonstrates how conditions fail to consider the realities of women's lives, including caregiving roles, safety needs, and poverty.

Women describe the recall process as disorienting, traumatic, and deeply demoralising. Often they are recalled with little or no notice, and no clear explanation. For those who are mothers, the suddenness of recall is especially traumatic, disrupting child contact or custody arrangements (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2022). Some women describe being caught in a cycle of short sentences, limited support, release, non-compliance, and recall. The trauma and instability of this pattern makes rebuilding a life extremely difficult. While less extensively theorised in recall-specific studies, some scholars highlight the intersectional dynamics at play, noting the overrepresentation of Black and minoritised

women in the prison population, including among those recalled (Martin, 2013). Structural inequalities relating to race, class, and immigration status intersect with gender in shaping both exposure to the criminal justice system and the likelihood of recall. Moreover, the criminalisation of poverty remains central, as the recall system can function as a mechanism of control for those already failed by health, housing, and welfare systems. This reinforces a cycle of punishment for women experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation.

Often, recalls are made due to women not engaging sufficiently with Probation workers (Petrillo, 2019), with women explaining their reasons for failing to keep in touch as follows:

- Most felt they could not rely on their responsible officer for support to resolve urgent social and practical problems they faced on release.
- Trust in the relationship was further undermined due to doubts that the responsible officer had the capacity and/or a genuine desire to help.
- The women felt their social needs were treated as indicators of increased risk of offending, resulting in them being reluctant to ask for help
- Women in the criminal justice system may have had complex interactions with statutory services which make them reticent to engage with yet another agency.

There are many recommendations for change in the literature, both from the perspective of women themselves and those who work with them. Overall, the literature demonstrates that women with lived experience advocate for:

- Continuity of support during and after resettlement.
- Involvement in decision-making around their own release and supervision.
- More realistic and flexible licence conditions that reflect their lives.
- Trauma-informed probation practice.
- Better access to housing, mental health care, and women's centres.

The literature presents a clear critique of the gender-insensitive and punitive nature of recall practices in the UK. Academic consensus suggests that recalls disproportionately impact women with histories of trauma, poverty, and abuse, often serving to reinforce rather than resolve cycles of criminalisation. Literature demonstrates a need for further intersectional research, especially focused on race, migration, and disability, and for empirical studies that evaluate alternatives to recall and community-based solutions.

## The Lancashire Women Reducing Recalls Project

Lancashire Women is a long-established women's charity, founded in 1985, which provides specialist, women-centred support across Lancashire. Working primarily through its network of women's centres and community services, it supports women experiencing a range of interconnected difficulties, including poverty, homelessness, mental ill-health, domestic abuse and involvement with the criminal justice system. Its Justice & Safety programme provides a gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach for women who are in contact with, or at risk of contact with, the criminal justice system, working across police, prison and probation settings and into the community. This includes support around accommodation, finance, employment, health and wellbeing, substance use and resettlement, recognising the multiple and complex needs that can make women particularly vulnerable to repeated criminal justice involvement.

The Lancashire Women Reducing Recalls project is part of the Innovation Grant Scheme. It was started in March 2024 and was initially funded until November 2025 - this was later extended to the end of March 2026, and then for a further three years. The project uses a test and learn approach to provide intensive support for women from Lancashire returning to custody on 2+ occasions via the introduction of a dedicated Recalls Officer role. The project is based at HMP Styal. The project provides a whole centred, trauma informed and innovative approach to addressing this issue by working alongside HMPPS and CRS staff, both in custody and in the community, to intercept and improve current support pathways for women, addressing gaps in support for women with multiple and complex needs. The project focuses on women returning to custody on 2+ occasions over a short period. Women returning to custody are flagged as a concern and the Recalls Officer contacts them to discuss the reasons for recall and how this can be addressed. It was originally expected that the Recalls Officer caseload would not exceed 4/5 cases at any given time, though the success of the project has meant this has not always been achievable with 12 referrals in January 2025 alone. This intensive approach with a relatively small caseload should enable the Recalls Officer to identify gaps in provision and map/link effectively with support services in the community and in custody to put beneficial solutions in place to enable the best possible chance of success on release. This includes providing a support and welfare pack on the day of release – comprising of clothing, toiletries, mobile phone and gate pickup – to enable a positive start back in the community.

These women are offered intensive 1-1 support including improved day of release and continuing support. This is in response to identified patterns regarding reasons for recall and gaps in support. The project aimed to result in improved communication / referral processes between prison and community probation services and improved partnership working thereby reducing delays in referrals to LW Justice & Safety team and other agencies. These outputs were expected to result in the following outcomes:

- Faster, personalised support to women who have been recalled or who are at risk of recall
- Higher number of positive outcomes achieved via prison/probation support with women who've being recalled 2+ times
- Reduction in recalls overall longer-term.

In November 2024 researchers from the Criminal Justice Partnership at the University of Lancashire (then the University of Central Lancashire) were commissioned to evaluate the project.

The aim of the research is to evaluate whether this approach is successful; seeking to generate lessons throughout the project and at project end to inform programme design improvement and future funding/delivery of support for this cohort.

Our primary evaluation questions are:

- How does the provision of intensive, comprehensive, multi-agency coordinated support reduce persistent recalls?
- How does the Lancashire Women Reducing Recalls Project influence persistent recalls?
- How could the initiative be improved/adapted to further the reach and scope?

This is a mixed methods evaluation that combines a qualitative interview study with anonymised combined case study evidence, and analysis of routinely gathered data.

We used data collected by Lancashire Women to investigate the effect of having a dedicated Recalls Officer in place (input) and whether it will lead to the following outputs:

- Women who've been recalled 2+ times receive intensive 1-1 support and improved day of release support
- Identified patterns regarding reasons for recall and gaps in support
- Improved communication / referral processes between prison and community probation services and improved partnership working - which reduces delays in referrals to LW Justice & Safety team and other agencies

Our sample size of beneficiaries was taken from participants in the project. The sample of staff and stakeholders came from HMP Styal, Probation and LW and were asked to provide insights on support historically provided as well as improvements made for women who have been recalled.

## Evaluation

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This report brings together findings from interviews with stakeholders, staff and women in prison, an online survey completed by practitioners working with women in prison, and anonymised numeric data collected by Lancashire Women on numbers of recalls of women on the project in Lancashire to the end of March 2026.

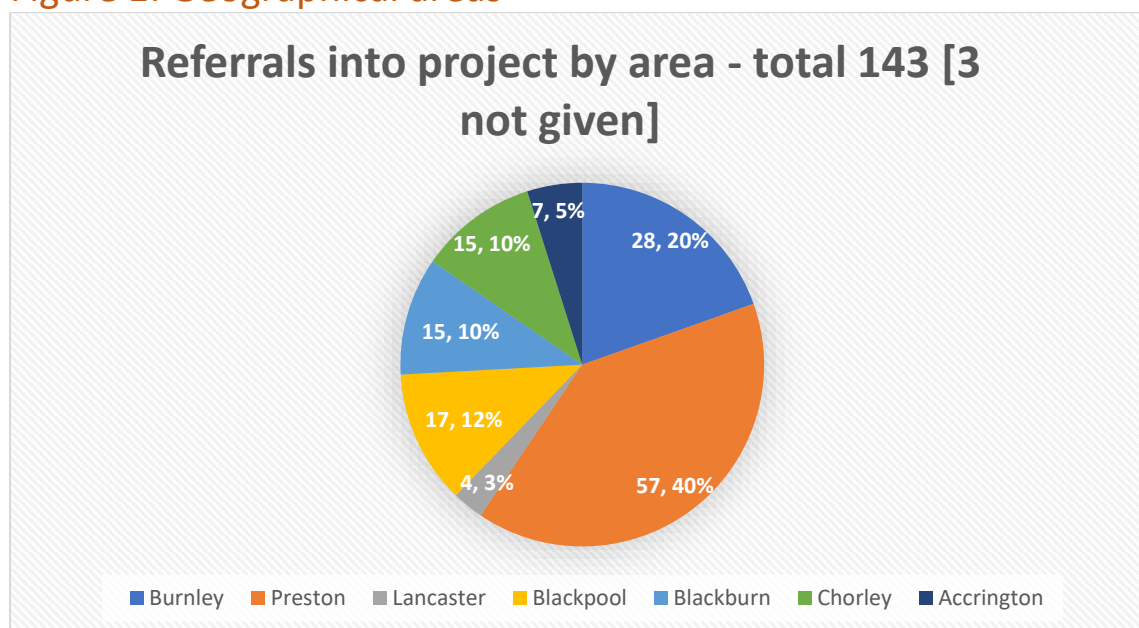
We asked for participants' insights into the aims and achievements of the project, and the barriers experienced. We also asked for thoughts on what is needed to address women's needs in the future.

Ethical approval for this research was provided by the University of Lancashire and the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC).

### Analysis of Data provided by Lancashire Women

From March 2024-31st March 2026 146 women who come from Lancashire have been referred to the Lancashire Women Recall Project. Of these 59 were offered support (some women were referred on more than one occasion). Figure 1 below shows the geographical areas across Lancashire the women came from into HMP Styal shows s over the period 1st March 2024-31st March 2026.

Figure 1: Geographical areas



**Offence type:** Table 1 below shows the offences the women referred into the project were originally convicted covering the period 1st March 2024-31st March 2026. The largest reason for recall was breach of licence with 101 (10 of these being in January 2025), shoplifting 20 and theft 20.

Table 1: Offence type

| Offence type                       | 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2024-31 March 2026 |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Arson                              | 2                                        |
| Assault Police Officer             | 2                                        |
| Assault ABH                        | 11                                       |
| Assault GBH                        | 1                                        |
| Breach of Licence Conditions       | 101                                      |
| Breach of Community Order          | 9                                        |
| Burglary                           | 11                                       |
| Conspiracy to supply class A drugs | 1                                        |
| Criminal Damage                    | 2                                        |
| Dangerous Driving/DUI              | 1                                        |
| Drunk & Disorderly                 | 1                                        |
| Fraud                              | 3                                        |
| Harassment                         | 6                                        |
| Possession of Class A              | 1                                        |
| Possession of Class B              | 1                                        |
| Robbery                            | 4                                        |
| Shoplifting                        | 20                                       |
| Theft                              | 20                                       |
| Theft of vehicle                   | 2                                        |

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Unlawful wounding | 2   |
| TOTAL             | 201 |

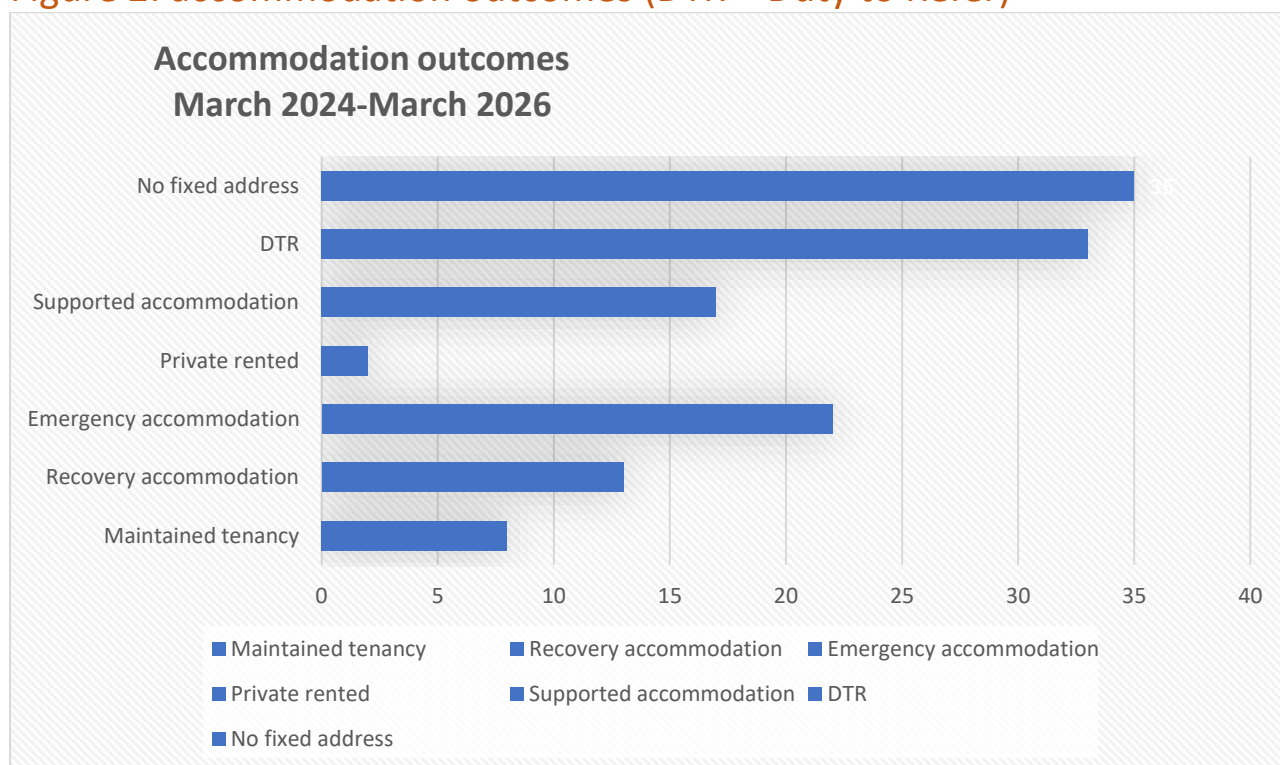
**Table 2: number of recalls of women on project**

| Number of times recalled |    |     |
|--------------------------|----|-----|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> time     | 21 | 36% |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> time     | 19 | 32% |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> time     | 8  | 14% |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> time     | 11 | 19% |

**Table 3: presenting needs reported by the women**

| Needs                                         | Number of women reporting this |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Housing (No Fixed Address)                    | 122                            |
| Drug misuse (current)                         | 111                            |
| Mental Health                                 | 83                             |
| Social Inclusion                              | 80                             |
| Vulnerable adult                              | 45                             |
| Alcohol issue (current)                       | 33                             |
| Sex worker                                    | 28                             |
| Historic domestic abuse                       | 26                             |
| Domestic abuse (current)                      | 20                             |
| Physical health                               | 16                             |
| Family and relationships (not domestic abuse) | 14                             |
| Care leaver                                   | 10                             |
| Learning difficulty                           | 7                              |
| Housing (not NFA)                             | 4                              |
| Child contact                                 | 4                              |

Figure 2: accommodation outcomes (DTR = Duty to Refer)



## Immediate feedback from women on the project

In their feedback to the Recalls Officer on the support provided by the project women expressed gratitude over several areas including:

- Help with accommodation
- Accessing services
- Support on the day of release with transport, mobile phones, food and toiletries and other items they may need
- Advice and support in custody and in the community

Many positive comments from the feedback records included notes referring to the high level of support and communication. The feedback consistently highlights the value of continuity, trusted relationships and practical support across custody and release. Women described feeling calmer, more motivated and better able to engage with probation and other services when they had a familiar worker who maintained contact and supported them through the transition into the community. Several comments also suggest that this support helped to prevent immediate relapse, improve accommodation and reduce the risk of rapid recall, including enabling women to achieve positive outcomes such as attending probation appointments and providing negative drug tests. Examples of comments are:

- *'Client feels thoroughly supported during this release and noted that they wished they would've accepted our support on previous sentences as they feel like it has helped them gain motivation to remain in the community.'*
- *'Client reported being extremely thankful for the support offered by Lancashire Women whilst in custody. They appreciated the constant communication and referrals that were submitted on their behalf. Client had referral to Reconnect and Adult Social Care, where an assessment was able to be conducted before leaving custody to assess clients needs- this is an area that has usually been a struggle due to clients recognising that they do not engage when in the community. '*
- *'Client reported being very thankful for the support of LW both in custody and on their release day. Client was previously released NFA which meant they were recalled to custody quickly, however on this occasion the client had the option of three accommodation types on release.'*
- *'Client reported that the support they received from LW was very good and helped their mental health whilst in custody. They reported receiving no support when they did their last recall at Newhall, so it was calming that they had a point of contact whilst in Styal. Client also reported being calmed by how friendly the LW staff were and that this helped her anxiety when we faced difficulties on their release day'.*
- *'Client was supported via a gate pickup and assistance with appointments throughout the day. Client recognises that without the support of a gate pickup they would not return to Preston and would instead go and score in Manchester, thus leading to an immediate recall. Support of the gate pickup also allowed client to give a negative drug test at probation induction'.*
- *'Client reported feeling supported in changing their outlook on their cycle of being in and out of custody. Client reported being thankful of having the same worker whilst in custody and having continuous communication with them, alongside being thankful that the Recalls officer was able to follow them into the community to get them to their probation induction. This is the first time in over a year that client has attended their probation induction and client was very happy that they are spending the weekend without a recall in place for them.'*
- *'Client and probation commented that it was the first time in approximately two years that client managed to attend their probation appointment and give a clean drug test upon release from custody'*

## Service User responses regarding barriers to resettlement

The women who were recalled were asked what the barriers had been to their resettlement. Often the response centred around:

- Lack of what they considered to be suitable accommodation
- Motivation to 'score' drugs on release
- Further offending
- Mental health issues and feeling unable to be in control for various reasons

- Lack of engagement with probation or other services.

Various reasons were given for the lack of engagement with probation, for example,

- Drug and alcohol use
- Not being able to get there
- Bad weather
- Removal of tag because it was uncomfortable
- Housing issues
- Miscommunication
- Not wanting to engage because of dislike of probation
- Not ready to be released from custody.
- Reported being intentionally recalled and their intention to continue this behaviour because they feel they are not supported enough to be released.
- Client requested to be held in custody until the end of their license to allow them time to get the support they require for a successful release’.

Sometimes the reasons were multiple and complex whereas in other situations improved communication may have led to a more productive outcome:

- *‘Client FTA their probation induction. Client reported that their appointment was at 11am, and they were still in HMP Styal at 10:30am, so they decided not to attend or give notice of being late’.*
- *‘Client stated they changed their address and probation did not have the correct address recorded. Client noted that they engaged well with probation and attended all appointments’.*

In some cases it was difficult to provide support on issues like housing due to the short nature of the women being informed of their release. Many of the issues highlighted above were also responses given when the women were asked by the project feedback form - What issues did you have? What didn't work?

Several women reported the multiple issues e.g. substance misuse, No fixed address [NFA] and mental health, as recorded by staff:

- *‘lack of supported living. Substance use. Vulnerabilities with mental health and being unmedicated in the community.’*
- *‘Client attributes their offending behaviour to their substance misuse. They reported shoplifting in order to score and fund somewhere to sleep for the night. Client reports that housing is the main issue, however does struggle to engage once in the community to access accommodation.’*

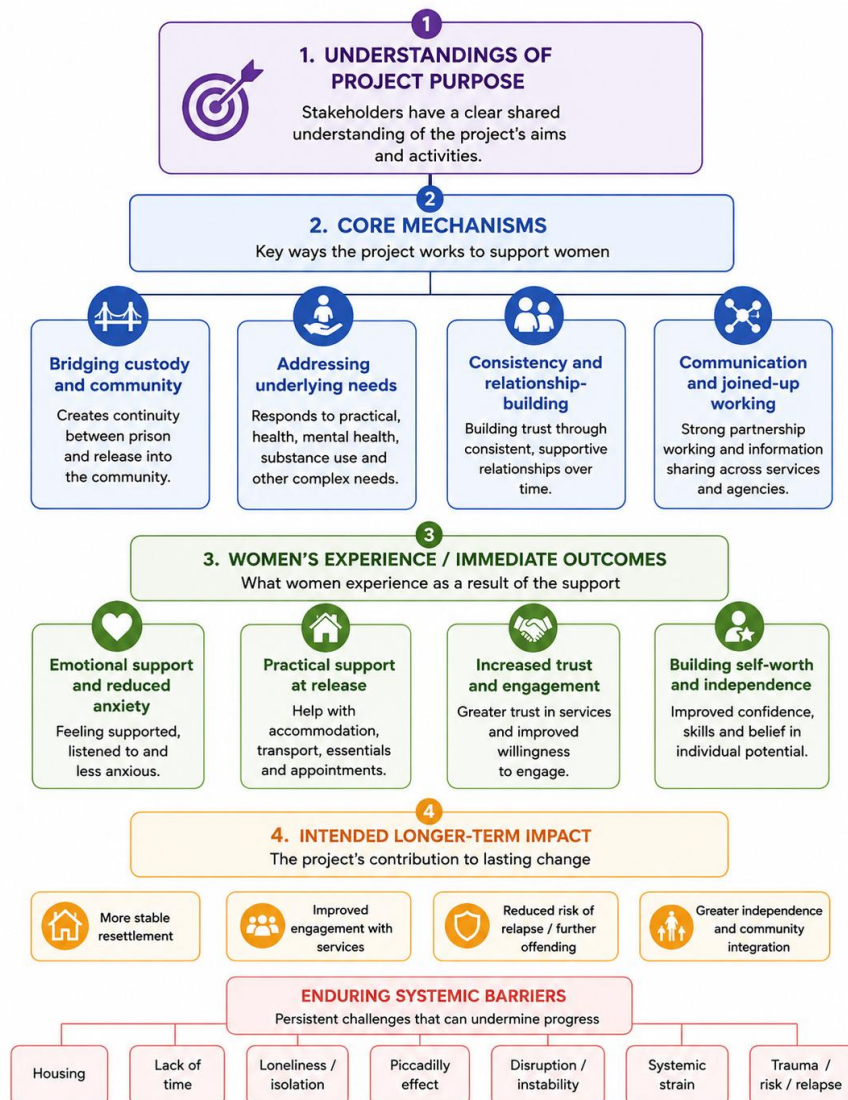
When probation staff were asked the question, What were the boundaries to resettlement on this recall? for their clients the vast majority of responses were about failure to attend

appointments with several failing to attend induction appointments, other reasons given included breach of licence conditions, failure to engage, safety issues, further offending.

## Interview and Survey Findings

Online interviews were held with 12 staff and stakeholders and 4 women beneficiaries. Six staff and stakeholders were interviewed twice, at the beginning and towards the end of the project. We envisaged being able to access more women who had been helped by the project, however there were multiple barriers to in-person and online interviews, which we discuss in the recommendations section. We have divided our results into themes that emerged from the discussions, related to 'Understanding', 'Impact' and 'Enduring Barriers'.

Figure 3: Hierarchy of themes arising from the interviews



## 1. Understanding of the Project's aims and activities

Participants demonstrated very good understanding of the aims and activities. with interviewees commenting they were:

- *'To support the women with their throughcare needs.'* (Staff member)
- *'To cut down on recalling of women to the prison and help them to feel more empowered and supported in the community, thus removing their ties to CJS.'*(Staff member)
- *'The aim is to support women on their 2nd and further recalls to custody and put in support that prevents them being recalled again.'* (Staff member)
- *'Just being there basically just someone to talk to or something to pick up a phone. Like if I need someone'* (Woman in prison)

## 2. IMPACT: Bridging the Gap Between Custody and Community

The period immediately following release emerged as a critical juncture. Participants described it as a time of heightened vulnerability, where the absence of coordinated support could lead to breach and recall. Several women contrasted past experiences of being 'released to nothing' with the stability provided when the Recalls worker actively provided a bridge between prison and community.

*'You're bridging the gap... I've struggled forever with the gap between here and the community... getting jobs, employment, it's all about self-worth.'* (Participant, former Woman in prison)

*'Sometimes we're even taking them through the gate and sitting them in the Women's Centre.'* (Staff member)

This mirrors evidence from re-entry literature highlighting the 'through-the-gate' model as critical for reducing reoffending (Millings et al., 2019). Without this continuity, practical challenges such as finding accommodation, accessing benefits, or arranging medication can compound emotional distress, increasing non-compliance risk (Malloch & McIvor, 2011).

Participants identified the destabilising effects of unmet basic and psychological needs post-release. Staff described using structured tools such as a Vulnerability Questionnaire to identify areas requiring intervention.

*'Do they feel safe? Is their health looked after?... A lot of them will fall back to substance misuse or being medicated for the sake of being medicated.'* (Staff member)

*'We complete a vulnerability questionnaire... that really started to pull out some of those things that we could challenge.'* (Staff member)

### 3. IMPACT: Building Self-Worth and Independence

Reintegration was described not simply as avoiding recall, but as building the confidence, skills and self-perception necessary for independent living. Engagement in structured, meaningful activities—including education, yoga and peer mentoring—was linked to feelings of control and hope.

*'I feel a lot better... my confidence, these things... it's all to do with self-worth.'*  
(Participant, Woman in prison)

*'I do yoga every night... I'm studying an Open University course... I do a lot for myself now.'* (Participant, former Woman in prison)

Desistance theory emphasises the role of identity transformation, seeing oneself as capable and valued, in sustaining change (Rodermond et al., 2016). Women's centres can provide spaces where this transformation is nurtured through strengths-based, gender-responsive programming.

Women valued workers who engaged not just with 'the case' but with 'the person', acknowledging emotional realities and life outside formal supervision. This holistic relationality fostered openness and reduced the fear of punitive responses to difficulties.

*'She helps me in here, but also she helps out in the community as well. She knows my actual life out there.'* (Woman in prison)

This reflects feminist critiques of correctional practice that warn against overly bureaucratic, compliance-driven relationships, advocating instead for relational justice approaches grounded in empathy, reciprocity and recognition (Dominey & Gelsthorpe, 2020; Pemberton et al., 2019).

### 4. IMPACT: Consistency and Relationship-Building

Consistent, trusting relationships with individual workers were described as a protective factor against recall. Workers' willingness to 'keep turning up' despite setbacks was perceived as validating and stabilising.

*'[NAME] has been in about four or five different times since I've been here... now she's not been in for months. That relationship... the validation she got... really helped her build some self-esteem.'* (Staff member)

The presence of a dedicated worker within the prison was particularly important because relationships could be maintained across repeated recalls. This meant that women did not have to repeatedly explain their circumstances and workers understood what had and had not worked previously.

*'They're trying to improve and develop and somebody like [recall officer] knows what didn't work last time, knows what difficulties are they're not going. Then there's nowhere to hide, so they've got to be open. Because she knows the story. And I think that is quite significant, that they're not having to repeat and repeat and repeat.'*  
(Staff member)

Having the Champion within the prison was also seen as beneficial, providing a further connection between women's experiences and organisational decision-making. However, for some women Styal itself was seen as a place of safety, due to lack of a safe alternative:

*'It's a home. They know the environment, they trust the environment .... They've got a bed, they've got everything they actually need, and when they come out and they've got absolutely nothing. So to have somebody to work with whilst on remand, which is unusual, I think that really supported [name] in trusting because one of her biggest problems was trusting of agencies and trusting of systems, because she's been in every system that that's gone.'* (Staff member)

## 5. IMPACT: Communication and Joined-Up Working

Joined-up working was identified as an important mechanism through which the project strengthened support around women.

*'Sometimes the ladies we're working with, they have no idea that we actually talked to each other. And so I think that the completely joined up working is pivotal, pivotal.'*  
(Staff member)

The project also created opportunities for agencies to experience the release process from the perspective of women. Staff described probation workers travelling to Styal and experiencing the journey themselves, which increased understanding of the practical barriers women faced on release.

*'That was brilliant. Just so because nobody understands the difficult, everybody's got difficulties. But unless you sit in it and experience it, you just think for goodness sake, why haven't they picked up that phone? Why haven't they done that? Well, This is why.'* (Staff member)

## 6. Enduring Barriers – Experienced by Women and Practitioners

Interview participants described a range of structural and organisational barriers that continued to affect the project's ability to prevent recall.

### Lack of appropriate housing and support

Housing emerged as one of the most persistent structural barriers. Staff described a shortage not simply of accommodation, but of accommodation capable of responding to women with multiple and complex needs and in the right geographical area. The

introduction of 14-day recalls was seen as intensifying this problem because there was insufficient time to secure appropriate provision.

*'I think it's worse of an issue now, you know, with the introduction of the 14-day recalls, the women that are getting stuck in that recall cycle are the more complex women...and that with a lot of the accommodation providers and the accommodation that we do have available in the community is not necessarily difficult to source, but it's difficult to source appropriate accommodation for them.'* (Staff member)

Staff also described how women could effectively lose access to housing options following an unsuccessful placement, with providers reluctant to offer a second opportunity. This may result in out of area placements.

*'Women aren't given second chances with housing. You mess up housing on a first recall, you're very unlikely to get it again. So if you are deemed priority need, but then they put you somewhere that is all singing and dancing in their world, but is not suitable for the woman, she doesn't stay there. You're not going to get that offer again. They're going to be intentionally homeless.'* (Staff member)

For the women reaching the third stage of the project's intervention, barriers were often systemic rather than located within the individual woman.

*'Very rare we get we get to third step. So we've got about 20% of women that have fallen into that third step and the bigger, wider issue that's stopping them to resettlement and it's usually systematic. So there might not be the correct housing provider for them. They might need mental health support, with probation support, with forensic setting, like there's probably about half of those women and that there isn't a service that's suitable for them to resettlement into. So they are constantly being recalled to custody and they're not getting that correct support.'* (Staff member)

Adult social care was another significant gap. Staff described situations where assessments were completed but appropriate provision was not available, or where responsibility between Cheshire, where HMP Styal is located, and Lancashire created delays.

*'When we're saying is that, there's nothing at the minute to cater to your needs, then that woman is not going anywhere. She's going back to the streets and she's going back into that cycle again and we have to start it again because if there's nothing for her, then it might be amazing that you've done the assessment, but it's not amazing that you can't give her something on day one.'* (Staff member)

These accounts highlight the importance of aligning recall prevention with broader social care, housing and health strategies. As Baldwin et al. (2022) argue, without addressing root causes of instability, compliance frameworks risk functioning as revolving doors back to custody.

## Loneliness and Isolation

Isolation emerged as a particularly important and somewhat unexpected feature of release. Staff described a sharp contrast between the highly social environment of custody and the experience of being placed alone in temporary accommodation.

*'I think it's just that that sheer void that people feel when they come out and they leave the hustle, the bustle, camaraderie, friends, relationships, even the stuff they don't like, you know? ... It's the routine, and it's a double edged sword, isn't it? Women will be going. Oh, I can't wait to get out but actually what they're getting out to isn't all there ready built. So it's like how do you sustain people while they start building it?'* (Staff member)

The staff member linked this to the need for support with managing boredom, expectations and loneliness, rather than treating these as individual failings.

*'You know that we can't stop people being bored, but what we can do is that help people start to think about how they manage being lonely. You know, that's what the therapeutic kind of process is about, isn't it?'* (Staff member)

This was particularly significant during the first night after release, when formal services often ended while women remained isolated and without protective relationships.

*'But that, you know, the fact that, we've we assume people have got a level of self-sufficiency to cope with suddenly being left in the empty hotel bedroom.'* (Staff member)

## 'Piccadilly' effect

One of the issues that many stakeholder interviewees mentioned was what we termed the 'Piccadilly effect'. Women could struggle to get beyond Piccadilly station in Manchester, particularly where release involved substance use, unfamiliar locations or separation from established support networks. Some women were released with no fixed address or sent outside Lancashire, where they did not know how to access the services to which they had been referred.

*'And then they get sent to somewhere that they've never been to be told to go to an office. They don't know where it is. They're having to talk to strangers for directions. I mean, that's setting them up to fail.'* (Staff member)

*'Not being ready to come out when they've come out, they've been displaced so that they've gone to Liverpool or they've gone to Bristol or they've gone to Timbuktu. So they're going to where there's no support network. So as soon as they come out, they know they're going where they're not going. So they don't even leave Piccadilly. So Piccadilly has been noted as being problematic.'* (Staff member)

Staff described release day itself as a point at which carefully developed support could quickly unravel. Mass release arrangements, travel through Manchester and contact with

other women returning to areas associated with previous substance use were identified as particular risks.

### Lack of Time

The 14-day recall period was repeatedly identified as a major constraint. Staff contrasted this with the longer period previously available to establish accommodation, care and treatment.

*'I mean, what can you do in seven days? You can't, can you? It's really difficult. Really difficult....[if they are recalled on a Friday. Days have gone when your staff member comes back to work on Monday.]' (Staff member)*

Staff also reported that when 28-day recalls had been available, there was greater opportunity to resolve problems at the first intervention.

*'If it was a 28 day recall, we'd be able to solve it on 1st intervention, but that just wasn't happening when FTR came in. It was second intervention that was the most successful kind of intervention with the woman really.'* (Staff member)

### Disruption and Instability

Short timeframes and service inconsistencies could result in women losing accommodation or support.

*'They lose places, there is a lack of consistency from services to them, there is a high level of anxiety and depression as well as Neurodiverse traits/diagnosis.'* (Staff member)

Out-of-area placements could further disrupt continuity, particularly where community workers had no local relationships with services and could only maintain contact by telephone.

*'We have to do our best with the time that we have to link them in with services wherever they are. And then that can be difficult because we've spent so long waiting with them to get their relationship up and trust up with us that then suddenly say, you know, you're going to have to go and meet this brand new person that, to be quite honest, knows that she's not going to go and engage, so why would they? I really can't blame them for that.'* (Staff member)

### Systemic Strain

The project highlighted difficulties created when responsibility for women moved between services, particularly where assessments and support were dependent on different geographical authorities.

*'We don't know where they're going until sometimes three days pre release is when we find out where they're going. Well, unless there's a care plan in place, that person's not going to get a care plan. And then they're not in that area long enough*

*to get a care plan organised and then back somewhere else. They consistently fall through the cracks.'* (Staff member)

## Trauma, Risk and Relapse

Staff emphasised the extent to which women's histories shaped their experiences of release and their responses to seemingly minor events.

*'I think it's easy to forget just how much trauma they've been through and how their view of the world is just so different from what thankfully mine is, and just how that those little things, the shape of that, just shape their response.'* (Staff member)

Substance misuse was particularly difficult to address where women were not receiving intensive support immediately following release.

*'But they're more prone to relapse on release because they'll go back and they haven't got a wraparound support of a statutory treatment provider because in their eyes they don't have a script, they don't kind of need anything one-to-one. They could access a group or they could always self-refer to [organisation], but not many women are going to do that at that point, they're just going to relapse. So I think maybe there is a gap.'* (Staff member)

These findings suggest that recall cannot be understood simply as the result of individual non-compliance. For some women, repeated recall reflected a persistent mismatch between their needs and the services available to meet them.

## Summary: Observed Benefits for Women

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Continuity of care, a trauma informed model and relationship-building were consistently identified as key benefits of the project.

*'There has been continuity of care, having that care taken from custody and into the community.'* (Staff member)

Staff also reported reductions in repeat recalls and improved engagement among some women:

*'I have noticed through our data a decrease in our repeat recalls and the particular woman's case I was involved in was successful as for the last few months (usually would return to prison within weeks) she has coped well in the community and engaged in support services.'* (Staff member)

The project also increased the availability and visibility of support for women in Lancashire:

*'Yes I have noticed that there is now much more support for women in Lancashire that are recalled to prison.'* (Staff member)

Importantly, staff stressed that progress should not be understood as linear. Repeat recall did not necessarily mean that support had failed; rather, some women experienced small but significant changes over time.

*‘Little things have happened, little changes have been done.’* (Staff member)

## Summary: Benefits for Staff and Working Practices

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The project strengthened communication, coordination and knowledge across custody and community services. A dedicated worker provided a clear pathway through complex systems and enabled agencies to respond quickly to recall.

*‘We need to be acting on day one of recall and we need to touch base with that person on day one of recall and having somebody in place who knows the person and knows the systems makes that a lot more effective because they’ve got the network.’* (Staff member)

The project also strengthened relationships between the prison, probation and community organisations.

*‘It adds communication pathways. It adds joined up working. I mean thankfully we’ve got a fantastic relationship with Styal anyway. But now with that recall provision within Styal, it just strengthens that.’* (Staff member)

Local knowledge was another important strength. Staff described how established relationships with councils, drug and alcohol services and other local organisations enabled the recalls worker to identify and challenge barriers quickly.

*‘And that’s one of the main. amazing things about this project is that if this was anybody else doing this work for Lancashire, they wouldn’t know what we know. We do this work day in, day out with different women on different contracts.’* (Staff member)

The project was therefore described as strengthening not only individual support but the wider infrastructure through which women were supported between custody and community.

## Summary: Recommendations for Policy

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**Strengthen Women’s Centre Involvement:** Women’s Centres occupy a unique neutral position within local and national networks and should remain central to recall and release planning, providing safe and familiar spaces for transition. Their role should be recognised within local commissioning and partnership arrangements.

**Embed the Recall Worker Model within Core Provision:** The recall worker role should be incorporated into core CRS provision across providers. The model should retain a prison-

based presence, enabling staff to build relationships before release and maintain continuity into the community and across subsequent recalls. Provision should be sufficiently resourced to support women with repeated recalls and complex needs.

**Allow More Time for Release Planning:** Recall periods can leave insufficient time to secure accommodation, care, treatment and safety planning. The introduction of 56 day recalls may help address this, but release planning should begin as early as possible and allow sufficient time for appropriate arrangements to be put in place.

**Develop Appropriate Housing and Places of Safety:** There is a need for accommodation that can respond to women with multiple and complex needs, alongside greater flexibility when placements break down. More suitable Approved Premises and Category 3 provision within Lancashire should be explored, alongside stronger links with local housing providers.

**Strengthen Health and Social Care Pathways:** Adult social care assessments should be initiated early and recognised across custody and community, reducing duplication between regions and preventing women from being released without the support to which they are entitled. Tailored pathways are also needed for women with high levels of anxiety, depression, and neurodiversity, recognising that standard processes may intensify distress.

**Strengthen Release-Day and First-Night Support:** Release arrangements should address the risks associated with mass release, travel and isolation during the first night and at weekends. Gate pickups should be adequately resourced and risk-managed, with consideration given to out-of-hours support and greater coordination between prison and community services.

**Advance Holistic, Woman-Led Approaches:** Recall prevention should begin by asking women what they need rather than assuming that standardised interventions will address their barriers. Support should respond flexibly to individual circumstances, including housing, substance use, health, relationships, routine, self-worth and meaningful activity.

**Embed a 'Never Give Up' Ethos:** Persistence and belief in women should be a core value of recall prevention. Women should know that support will continue after setbacks and that a recall does not mean they have failed or will be abandoned.

**Build Sustainable Local Networks:** The project demonstrates the value of strong relationships between prison-based workers, probation, women's centres, local authorities, health services, housing providers and voluntary-sector organisations. These networks should be embedded within local systems rather than dependent on individual relationships or short-term funding.

**Move Towards Sustainable Provision:** The recall worker model should be incorporated into longer-term commissioning arrangements rather than relying on short-term grant funding. Provision should be available to women regardless of geographical location, while retaining sufficient local knowledge and flexibility to respond to different communities.

The key takeaway here is that recall prevention requires more than improving women's compliance with existing systems. It requires changing the conditions into which women are released. Where suitable housing, trusted relationships, care, treatment and practical support are absent, repeated recall can become a predictable outcome of systemic gaps rather than individual failure.

## Summary: Recommendations for the Reducing Recalls Project

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**Increase Staffing and Geographic Coverage:** As the prison serves women from multiple regions, the project should increase staffing and geographical coverage while retaining strong links with women's centres. Outreach workers could meet women in prison before release and continue to work with them through community hubs, extending the reach of the existing model.

**Maintain Small Caseloads and Protect Relational Time:** Small caseloads should remain central to the model. Staffing levels should reflect the intensity and emotional demands of supporting women with repeated recalls and complex needs, allowing workers sufficient time to develop trusting relationships and respond flexibly to setbacks.

**Develop the Model Beyond Lancashire:** The model should be codified and tested across other geographical areas while retaining its core principles of consistency, woman-led support, trauma-informed practice and strong custody–community links. Replication should allow for local adaptation rather than imposing a standardised model.

**Increase Awareness and Dissemination:** Learning from the project should be shared through the Female Justice Partnership, practitioner events, workshops and wider dissemination. This would support learning among areas considering similar provision and help build a wider evidence-informed approach to recall prevention.

**Strengthen the Evidence Base:** Future evaluation should collect more detailed demographic and contextual data, including age, ethnicity, children and caring responsibilities, geography, nature of offences and previous recall history. This would allow exploration of whether particular groups are more or less likely to access the project or achieve positive outcomes, and how structural factors shape these outcomes.

**Future development should build on what has worked rather than redesign the model.** The central learning is that effective recall prevention depends on having the right person, with sufficient time, knowledge and local relationships, working alongside women across the transition from custody to community. Relational support is most effective when it is backed by the wider housing, health, social care and community infrastructure women need to sustain their lives after release.

## Ongoing Implementation of Recommendations

**1. Continuing and extending the recall model:** The most significant development is that the project has moved beyond the initial pilot. The Reducing Recalls project has been extended for a further three years, with plans to work with partners in Merseyside and Greater Manchester. The evaluation highlighted the difficulty created by women being released outside Lancashire and the resulting loss of local relationships. The move towards working with partners in Merseyside and Greater Manchester is therefore a particularly important implementation response. It has the potential to help address the 'Piccadilly effect' and geographical displacement by creating stronger networks across the areas to which women are actually released.

**2. Strengthening the custody - community model:** Lancashire Women has continued to develop its wider Justice & Safety provision around women with multiple and complex needs and criminal justice involvement. Its public description emphasises gender-responsive, multi-agency support addressing issues including homelessness, emotional wellbeing, trauma and abuse. During the project, it became apparent that a small minority of women with 'complex needs' were being recalled. In light of this, Anna Javed (Senior Probation Officer and Female Justice Partnership lead), along with Sarah Norcross (Lancashire Women) and Clare Ashworth (NW Women's lead) met to carry out a 'deep dive' into the case files of 8 of these women. This highlighted work that needed doing in particular areas such as accommodation and wrap-around support. Dr Rebecca Fish, with Lancashire Female Justice Partnership, secured funding from the University of Lancashire to hold a series of workshops that involved over 50 people from multi-agency groups to discuss progress and ways forward in these complex areas. A subsequent manifesto on this topic developed by the group is being produced.

**3. Developing and sharing the model:** Lancashire Women has also begun disseminating the learning from the project. The organisation hosted a Reducing Recalls conference with the University of Lancashire to share the initial evaluation findings with partners from policing, probation and community justice. Subsequently, members of the project including Rebecca Fish, representatives from Lancashire Women along with two women with lived experience, were invited to present at the Centre for Justice Innovation event, 'Effective Community Justice for Women: Building momentum for change' in Birmingham in May 2026. They have been invited to lead future workshops and webinars starting in December 2026. This addresses the recommendation to share learning and build local problem-solving capacity. It also creates a route for the model to influence practice beyond the women directly supported by the project.

## Conclusion

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The findings from this project underscore the critical importance of trauma-informed, relationship-based, women-centred support throughout the recall and release process. Women's experiences highlight the challenges posed by short recall periods. The project demonstrates that consistent, flexible, and persistent support, coupled with dedicated roles such as the Recalls Officer, can significantly improve engagement, self-worth, and long-term stability.

Implementing the recommendations including expanding geographic coverage and increased staffing whilst maintaining small caseloads will help to bridge the gap between custody and the community, ensuring women receive continuity of care and the opportunity to rebuild their lives safely. Central to these improvements is a culture of persistence and belief in women, which has been shown to empower participants, reduce reoffending, and foster trust in services.

From this evaluation, policy recommendations highlight the need for longer planning windows, stronger housing and safeguarding, continuity of services, attention to mental health and neurodiversity, and the embedding of consistent, relationship-based approaches. Overall, these recommendations provide a practical roadmap for enhancing recall support and community integration, ensuring that the project's approach can be scaled, sustained, and replicated in other regions to better meet the needs of women leaving custody.

Although the new Sentencing Act and plans for early release may impact on the success of the project in the future, it is clear that the Lancashire Women Recalls Project has already generated much impact, by moving from surface level support to garnering deep commitment to 'visibility and voice' (Vanstone & Worrall, 2025). This was achieved by working holistically with women and providing 'consistent and continuing support' as recommended by Dominey and Gelsthorpe (2020). Working at this level of deep commitment makes a genuine contribution to equality and social justice, and should be a cause for celebration (Vanstone & Worrall, 2025).

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